

Colville Forest Plan Revision

Non-Motorized Recreation Community of Interest Meeting

March 22, 2016

5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Spokane Community College/Institute for Extended Learning, Colville, WA

Meeting Purpose and Overview

The U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (U.S. Institute¹) hosted a Non-Motorized Community of Interest meeting for the Colville National Forest Plan Revision process in Colville, Washington on March 22, 2016. The meeting provided a combination of formats including a presentation, full group and table group discussion, and question and response. Sixteen representatives from non-motorized recreation organizations active on the Colville National Forest attended the meeting, as well as U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service) staff from the Colville National Forest (Attachment A). The meeting was facilitated by Susan Hayman and Tricia Tillmann from EnviroIssues (contracted to provide third-party neutral services on behalf of the U.S. Institute).

The primary purpose of the meeting was to provide participants an opportunity to learn about the U.S. Forest Service's proposals for long-term management of the Colville National Forest, with a particular focus on how the proposals could affect non-motorized recreation activity on the forest. Proposals were developed in cooperation with seven cooperating entities² and with input from the public and interest groups. The DEIS describes and analyzes six alternatives for long-term management of the forest. **The draft plan reflects the Forest Service Preferred Alternative identified in the DEIS, which is Alternative P.** Participants also received information on how to comment on the proposals, how their comments will be used, and ongoing and future opportunities to be involved in the forest plan revision process.

Meeting Agenda

Susan Hayman, EnviroIssues facilitator, welcomed everyone and explained the meeting objectives, agenda, and meeting conduct. She spoke briefly about the value of public participation in the forest plan revision process and encouraged participants to share what they learn with their organizations and communities. She explained Forest Service staff were present as subject matter experts on forest plan revision and were participants, not hosts, of the meeting.

Presentation

Following introductions by everyone present at the meeting, Susan invited Amy Dillon, Forest Plan Revision Team Leader, to present the key concepts relevant to non-motorized recreation interests. Amy reviewed the purpose and scope of forest plans, including what forest plans can and cannot change. She also covered the need for change, key issues that informed the development of alternatives, how

¹ The U.S. Institute, under federal law, helps federal agencies and other affected stakeholders address environmental disputes, conflicts, and challenges through programs and services that provide situation assessments; conflict resolution; facilitated collaboration; and capacity building. The U.S. Institute is a program within the Udall Foundation.

² The seven cooperating entities are the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Kalispel Tribe, Spokane Tribe of Indians, the State of Washington, and Ferry, Pend Oreille and Stevens Counties in the State of Washington.

riparian management and wildlife habitat are addressed, and key differences between the alternatives for non-motorized recreation use. The key differences between alternatives for non-motorized recreation use are:

- Percent of forest that would be managed specifically for non-motorized use
- Direction for mechanized use such as mountain bikes
- Establishment of recreation Special Interest Area

Please see Attachment B (provided in a separate file) to view the presentation slides.

Questions & Answers (Q&A) | Full Group Discussion

The following is a summary of questions (Q), comments (C), and corresponding responses (R) from the full group discussion. Participants generated questions through a small group discussion at their table, then proposed a single question from their table for the full group discussion. Additional table questions were addressed as time allowed. Representatives of the non-motorized recreation groups present provided all questions and comments. Unless otherwise indicated, the Forest Service provided all responses.

Q: Please define Special Interest Area clearly, including limits of acceptable use and assurances moving forward, since these areas are not Congressionally designated. What would prevent the Forest Service from changing the designation in the next forest plan revision process?

R: A Special Interest Area (SIA) is an administrative designation for an area less than 100,000 acres in size that possesses geologic, recreational, or other categories of special interest. The Regional Forester makes the designation. A recreation SIA such as the Kettle Crest SIA would be managed and developed to emphasize recreation that already exists in an area valued for both motorized and non-motorized recreation across all four seasons.

Nothing would change in the type of use allowed in the area. SIAs are an overlay of management direction, not a management area themselves. The direction for existing management areas such as backcountry motorized, backcountry, and active or general restoration would continue. Areas that were non-motorized in 1988 would remain that way; areas that were motorized in 1988 would remain that way. The location of those uses may or may not change.

However, there is additional direction for SIAs to manage for recreational uses. The area could also be managed for the wilderness character that all uses enjoy. For example, several roads cross the proposed Kettle Crest SIA and are now managed as trails. Those road templates could be scaled back to trail width to improve the wilderness character of the area. The proposed SIA could also accommodate management of whitebark pine to address bark beetle infestation. The SIA provides more management flexibility.

To change the designation of the Kettle Crest SIA in a future forest plan would require the full analysis completed for this forest plan revision process. To rescind a SIA requires the same level of public involvement in arriving at that decision as enacting the SIA at the Forest Service regional office level.

Q: How can you perform trail maintenance for non-motorized recreation use in a wilderness area?

C: For example, our members are older and do not want to use crosscut saws.

R: If an area is wilderness, the Forest Service does not allow the use of chainsaws – it is recognized that this can be challenging. Instead, crosscut saws, pulley systems, and other approaches must be used.

Q: Are these restrictions the same in recommended wilderness areas?

R: If Alternative B or R were selected, recommended wilderness areas would be managed as if they were designated, which would apply the non-motorized tools to trail maintenance. These two alternatives also have the largest percentage of recommended wilderness across the alternatives. Other alternatives such as Alternative P would be managed as-is and with existing uses at the same level unless and until Congress designates the area as wilderness. However, the wilderness character of the recommended wilderness area would have to be maintained under all alternatives until Congress acts.

These differences between alternatives reflect the public comments the Forest Service received, which were used to help develop these alternatives and include various preferences for management.

Q: What happens if more people want to use the recommended wilderness area?

R: The Forest Service is required to maintain the wilderness character of recommended and designated wilderness. For example, if popularity of a use such as mountain biking were to increase dramatically and infringe on the wilderness character of a recommended wilderness area, the Forest Service would have to take action.

Q: Under Alternatives B and R, is the defacto wilderness approach defensible in court? Could the Forest Service legally keep out other uses such as timber harvest?

R: Under Alternative P, most recommended wilderness overlays designated Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) from 2001. The Forest Service has lost more court cases due to not preserving wilderness character in these areas, as opposed to preserving it. Other alternatives vary by whether recommended wilderness is already designated as an IRA. Commercial harvest and roadbuilding are not allowed in IRAs, regardless of the recommended wilderness designation.

Q: Has Congress ever weighed in on a SIA designation? Is the proposed SIA large enough that Congress could act?

R: Congress weighs in on designations that require “outstandingly remarkable value(s).” It is really unlikely the proposed SIA on the Colville National Forest would meet those high-bar characteristics. The size of the proposed SIA is also smaller than those that Congress typically weighs in on, for example National Scenic Areas or National Recreation Areas.

Q: The table in the presentation shows mechanized trail miles that could be lost under each alternative. Are there any plans to replace the mountain bike trails in other areas?

R: The miles of trails lost shown in the presentation are under the assumption that recommended wilderness eventually becomes designated wilderness. The draft plan lists where potential trails could be, but does not indicate where a specific trail would be. After the forest plan is signed, a district ranger would have to propose a project and get public input to add a trail for mountain bikes. Trails for this kind

of use cannot be established in designated or recommended wilderness, or research natural areas; all other management areas are available for siting a mountain bike trail.

Q: Is the plan costed out and if so, have you earmarked money for putting trails back that you lose?

R: The draft plan does not include a budget for all activities.

Q: If mountain bikes lose 100 miles of trail and you want to put another 100 miles in, does it mean that the current number of trails and road miles are maintained – that if you put in 100 miles of trail, you have to lose 100 miles of road elsewhere?

R: This draft plan does not restrict miles of trail. There is no limit in this draft plan on how many miles of trail can be created. We are constrained by our budget, riparian standards, and other resources, but there is nothing that restricts the total miles of trail. Roads, however, are different.

C: Kettle Crest SIA has a certain value and provides a sense of place, both of which are measured on a Recreation Opportunity Spectrum. I recall the area is relatively unique by this standard.

R: Kettle Crest is unique on the forest in a way because nearly everyone can connect with it, although this is somewhat of a personal opinion. Abercrombie is similar in that way.

Q: In the Wild Olympics Initiative, the Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance ranked the value of each trail for different types of uses. Has the Forest Service done an inventory with users to see what the proposed loss of trails under different alternatives looks like for various users and their value? As mountain bikers, if we are losing low value trail, we can get behind that. Would the Colville National Forest consider doing this kind of inventory?

R: The Forest Service doesn't believe there has been a comparable inventory. The Forest Service does have a sense of which trails are feeder trails. These are the trails used to access more commonly used or higher value areas. They'd be happy to take a look at the Wild Olympics Initiative to see if there would be use for a similar analysis on the Colville.

Q: What would the Forest Service do in recommended wilderness areas if endangered species were observed prior to designation as wilderness? Would it affect management or the designation decision?

R: The location of listed or potentially listed wildlife does not play into a wilderness designation, as the designation is more dependent on the physical characteristics of the landscape. Wildlife fits in through a different system. If such an animal were seen and the Forest Service were notified, it would not affect the wilderness evaluation of the area.

Q: When were different user groups met with over the years and how was it decided what to focus on now? Things change when plans are worked on for many years.

R: The Colville National Forest plan revision effort used to be connected to the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest effort – because of this, interactions with user groups extended all the way to Seattle. These planning processes were separated in 2014. This DEIS and draft plan were largely developed in August 2014, though the Forest Service has met with many people about this since 2003.

Q: Where can non-motorized recreation occur generally? In which management areas?

R: Most non-motorized recreation uses can occur in all management areas, both now and into the future.

Q: Regarding the percentage of acres suitable for timber production, Alternative P is 60% and the other alternatives vary. What does that mean for non-motorized recreation trails in those areas?

R: The “suitable” designation indicates the land could be used for timber production, fuels treatment, and harvest, for example. If there was a decision to work in an area, protecting the existing trail would be a part of the forest plan, for example by protecting the view and retaining mechanized uses. Treatment that might impact trails would be allowed in emergency situations, but would be minimal. This type of work is at the project level, not at the forest plan level. The Forest Service would ask the public about their thoughts for the particular project and respond accordingly.

Q: If an area is recommended to be wilderness, how would the permitting process for research in that area change?

R: The Forest Service will follow-up on that question. Special Use permits are offered in wilderness, but they need to conform with wilderness requirements and what is stated in the forest plan to manage the wilderness. For example, collaring grizzly bears in the Salmo-Priest Wilderness required Regional Forester permission. However, if the area is proposed for recommended wilderness in Alternative B or R, the wilderness requirements would apply as soon as the area was recommended. The permitting process varies by alternative.

Q: How does the Forest Service propose to maintain wilderness so we do not have complex fires? Far more can be cleared with mechanized equipment than non-mechanized equipment.

R: The Forest Service is never going to be able to manage the 1.1 million acres of the Colville National Forest to prevent fire because we are in a fire system. Large fires will continue to be a part of this forest.

C: If we are unable to keep trails open for firefighting or other uses in a recommended wilderness area, it compounds the problem of not being able to take care of the forest because it makes it more difficult to help.

R: The Forest Service encourages everyone to submit substantive comments, including comments on the difficulty having wilderness brings to your interest. The same applies for the comments on the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum mentioned earlier because it provides a different perspective.

Questions & Answers (Q&A) | Table Groups

After a short break, participants gathered at three tables to discuss how the draft plan and proposed alternatives could affect three types of non-motorized recreation use on different areas of the Colville National Forest: horseback riding, mountain biking, and walking (for example, hiking). Each table had several large maps, one each for the six alternatives, a detailed map for Alternative P (Forest Service Preferred Alternative), a map of critical wildlife and key watershed areas on the forest, and a map of

IRAs. Maps of the forest road and trail system were also posted around the room. At the end of the small group discussion, participants shared their observations with the full group.

Horseback riding

Several participants noted they now understood that while the draft forest plan does not take action on specific trails, the proposed management areas and specific management direction could affect their trail use. They confirmed their need to look at the maps to see how proposed management areas on the forest under each alternative would affect their group if implemented. Then, participants observed they could comment on what works well (or not) for them based on the alternative maps.

Mountain biking

Participants noted there were minor boundary changes proposed and they liked a lot of the proposals. Participants explained they were able to discern what would affect mountain biking use and feel better equipped to comment on what mountain bikers would like to be different.

Walking (e.g., hiking)

Participants explained that they spoke about different areas on the forest and various restrictive uses, and observed there appeared to be few effects on hikers and hunters from the forest plan proposals.

Questions & Answers (Q&A) | Additional questions

Susan asked participants for any remaining questions.

Q: All our conversations have been about summer non-motorized use. What about snowshoeing, Nordic and backcountry skiing, and other winter non-motorized recreation? There is an over-snow vehicle designation as part of the 2005 Forest Service Travel Management Rule. Will the Colville National Forest approach winter non-motorized recreation as they do summer non-motorized recreation?

R: The Forest Service may want to engage winter non-motorized recreation users specifically in these kinds of conversations and separately. Over-snow use is addressed in the draft plan through suitability determinations that show which management areas would allow for non-motorized and motorized over-snow use. Those suitability determinations will provide direction to develop an over-snow vehicle use map. The over-snow vehicle use map will be developed after the draft forest plan, so it will be consistent with the revised forest plan. There is a table in the draft forest plan that reflects which management areas would be open to over-snow motorized or non-motorized uses.

Susan added that non-motorized winter recreation users were invited, but did not respond to the invitation or were otherwise unable to attend. The U.S. Institute will consider how to proceed with engaging non-motorized winter recreation users. The Motorized Recreation Community of Interest meeting (March 23, 2016) will include those who snowmobile and engage in other motorized over-snow use.

Next steps and final questions

Susan invited Amy Dillon to review opportunities to comment on the draft revised forest plan and DEIS, and participate in the overall public involvement process. Amy explained the comment period was extended 45 days and now ends July 5, 2016. Anyone can comment during this time via email, the website, and toward the end of the comment period, through listening sessions. The listening sessions have not yet been scheduled because the comment period was just extended. Once all comments are submitted, the Forest Service reviews the comments and determines if changes to the alternatives are needed and/or if an entirely new alternative is needed. Then, the Forest Service has an internal review with the Forest Service Regional and Washington, D.C. offices. The Forest Service anticipates the final revised forest plan documents in early spring 2017 if all goes well. There is an opportunity to file an objection between the release of the final documents and the record of decision. If someone has commented during a public comment period, they have standing to object at this time if they choose to do so.

Participants were reminded that the draft revised forest plan is based on Alternative P, and to please refer to that map for the Forest Service Preferred Alternative. Five other alternatives were considered. Participants were encouraged to comment on both the things they like and don't like about all the alternatives (not just Alternative P). It is helpful to have both perspectives.

Q: Are all comments public?

R: Yes, there is a public comment reading room online. It can be accessed through the comment page on the Forest Plan Revision website. Comments include emails and handwritten letters, which are scanned in and added to the online list.

Susan displayed onscreen and reviewed the online open house, Forest Plan Revision website, comment reading room, and interactive map.

Q: Can maps be included in a comment?

R: Yes – they can be attached to the comment.

Susan concluded the meeting by encouraging participants to share what they learned with their networks and let the Forest Service know about good community events to attend. She reviewed the project information card, public involvement one-pager, and feedback form for submittal at the meeting or electronically following the meeting. She also reviewed a potential upcoming public involvement opportunity following the close of this public comment period to problem-solve around key issues that arise during the comment period. These Topical Work Groups would be by invitation and open to the public to observe.

Susan thanked everyone for attending and adjourned the meeting.

Attachment A. Participants

Name	Organization
Alan Benitz	Backcountry Horsemen of Washington
Almer Casile	Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance – Eastern Washington Chapter
Alyson Benitz	Backcountry Horsemen of Washington
Amy Dillon	U.S. Forest Service – Colville National Forest
Bart George	Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Bill Way	Northeast Washington Trailblazers
Bob Mirasole	Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Bruce Foreman	Backcountry Horsemen – Northeast Washington Chapter
Craig Newman	U.S. Forest Service – Colville National Forest
Daniel Todd	Northeast Washington Trailblazers
Debbie Kelly	U.S. Forest Service – Colville National Forest
Dolly Watkins	Backcountry Horsemen of Washington
Eric McQuay	U.S. Forest Service – Colville National Forest
Franklin Pemberton	U.S. Forest Service – Colville National Forest
Holly Weiler	Washington Trails Association
Lewis Trout	Pacific Northwest Trail Association
Mary Hodges-Cates	Pacific Northwest Trail Association
Matt Scott	Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Rodney Smoldon	U.S. Forest Service – Colville National Forest
Stuart Nieman	Backcountry Horsemen – Northeast Washington Chapter
Talina Spurgeon	Backcountry Horsemen of Washington
Tim Baris	Northeast Washington Trailblazers
Will Stone	Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance – Eastern Washington Chapter